

GLOSSARY

Introduction to Game Design LiveLessons

Colleen Macklin and John Sharp

Elements of Games

Objects

The objects in a game are the elements with which the game is played. In Soccer, these include the ball and the goals.

Actions

The actions are the things players do while playing the game. Often, these involve using the objects in varying ways. In Soccer, the actions include kicking and running.

Play Space

The play space is the area within which a game is played. In Soccer, this is the field.

Players

The players are the participants in the game. Without them, the game does not happen, and the objects and play space remain inert.

Goals

The goal(s) of a game establish what the players are trying to achieve. In Soccer, the goal is to score goals, and to have the most goals within the allotted amount of time.

Rules

The rules define how the game is played. The rules determine the use of the objects, the permissible actions, the play space, the number of players, the goals of the game, even the length of the game.

Basic Game Design Tools

Constraint

Constraint is the limitation of the actions players can take, the objects they can use, and the space within which they can pursue their goals within the game. Constraint is paradoxically one of the key sources of fun for players.

Stylization

Stylization is the process of refining and refocusing some aspect of human action in order to produce an enjoyable play experience. Foosball stylizes the game of Soccer by placing players on handles in fixed positions.

Abstraction

Abstraction is the process of taking a behavior or phenomenon and simplifying it to create a playable system. *The Metagame* abstracts conversation around culture, while *Pandemic* abstracts the spread and treatment of epidemiology.

Indirection

Indirection is the process of designing the actions of a game in a way that players do not have direct access to performing the actions. In Foosball, players manipulate the handles, which in turn rotate the small soccer players who kick the ball. In videogames, players engage with controllers or keyboards that map to actions in the game.

Decision-making

Decisions are the basic building blocks of game-based play. Players are making innumerable decisions as they work toward the goal(s) of the game. Each decision corresponds to an action in the game.

Feedback

Feedback is the mechanism by which players assess the success or failure of their actions. The player carries out an action, and the game provides feedback to let the player know their action happened, and to let them know the outcome of that action.

The Kinds of Play

Competitive

Games in which players compete against one another in pursuit of the game's goals. Chess is an example of a two-player, turn-based competitive game, while Basketball is an example of a multiplayer, real-time competitive game.

Cooperative

Games in which players work together in pursuit of the game's goals. *Pandemic* is an example of a turn-based, simulation-based cooperative game, while *Portal 2* is an example of a realtime, whimsical cooperative game.

Chance-based

Games in which some aspects of the game state are random or out of the control of the player(s). *Candy Land* is a turn-based, role-playing game of chance. *Android: Netrunner* is an asymmetrical, two-player game that mixes strategy and chance in ways that keeps the game "evergreen."

Skill-based

Games in which a player's state in a game is in their control, and progression toward the goals is dictated by player performance. Chess is an example of a two-player abstract strategy game that requires a good deal of skill. Basketball is a multiplayer team sport that demands a combination of mental and physical skill.

Whimsical

Games in which the play experience is humorous, dizzying, or otherwise provoking similar emotions. *QWOP* is a single-player, realtime whimsical game. *Twister* is a multiplayer, turn-based, skill-based whimsical game that has a heavy dose of chance.

Role-playing

Games in which story plays a prominent role. *Dungeons & Dragons* is a multiplayer, cooperative tabletop role-playing game that provides a framework for generating a story. *The Path* is a single-player, real-time role-playing game in which players inhabit a pre-authored story and its world.

Simulation-based

Games that in some model aspects of real world phenomenon. *The McDonald's Videogame* is a single-player "god game" that models the impacts of fast food on the environment, workers, animals, employees, customers and corporate boards. *Papers, Please* is a single-player role-playing game in which the player takes on the role of a border agent inspecting passports.

Turn-based

Games in which the play unfolds in discrete separate rounds or turns. Poker is a multiplayer, turn-based game of chance in which play unfolds in player turns within betting rounds. *Desert Golfing* is a single-player, skill-based game in which players try to "hit" a ball in a hole.

Realtime

Games in which play is continuously taking place, usually within a defined period of time or to a certain score. *Street Fighter IV* is a competitive, two-player, skill-based game that happens in real-time. Field Hockey is a real-time team sport in which players cooperatively work as teams to score the most goals in the allotted time.

Shaping Play Experiences

Design Values

Design values are the guiding principles that help steer the design of your game. They provide reminders for the kind of play experience you want your players to experience.

Point of View

The way your players see the screen-based game. This can take many forms, including 2D side view (*Hugpunx*), 3D first person view (*30 Flights of Loving*), 3D third person view (*Journey*), top-down or overhead view (*SimCity*), etc.

Perception

Closely related to point of view is the way the player perceives the gameworld. Perception speaks to the way the player makes sense of the world. Is it simple, iconic graphics? Is it stylized, blocky geometry? Realistically modeled? Tightly constrained spaces? Wide open spaces?

Theme

The theme of a game is what it is about, or better stated, how the game represents itself and its logical structures. The theme of game helps us understand the game as a play machine. Themes allow players to create logical understandings of our games, and helps them think through their play experiences. Chess, for example, has a light theme of medieval war within an oligarchic structure.

Decision-making

If, as Sid Meier says, games are a series of interesting decisions, then how players make their decisions is an important criteria. Is it turn-based? Realtime? Fast? Slow? How much information has to be considered? How far ahead do they need to think? Is all information visible to all players, as in Chess? Or some information hidden, as in Poker?

Yomi

The Japanese concept of knowing the mind of your opponent. Yomi is a big part of building up the strategic depth of a game.

Challenge

Challenge is the pressure put on players as they attempt to achieve the goals of a game. Is the challenge mostly intellectual, like in *The Witness*? Or is it more physical, as in sports like Soccer or Basketball? Or a mix, like in *Braid*?

Chance + Strategy

The degree to which players can make confident decisions around their pursuit of goals relates to how much chance factors into the progression of the game. Is it a game of pure chance like *Candy Land*? Or a mix of chance and strategy, like *Android: Netrunner*? Or a game of skill, like Darts?

Context

Who is playing? Where are they playing? When are they playing? On what platform? Why are they playing? These are all factors that relate to the context of gameplay. Each plays into the quality of play experience a player has.